

Draft Floor Speech on the Opioid Crisis Reponses Act

- Next Monday, the Senate will vote on opioids bill that Leader McConnell calls “landmark legislation”
- Work of 5 committees, more than 70 senators and includes 70 proposals
- **A big bill can be hard to talk about , so let me give you just 10 key provisions:**
 1. The STOP Act—Stop illegal drugs, including fentanyl, from coming across the border through the mail
 2. New non-addictive painkillers, research and fast-track
 3. Blister packs for opioids, such as a 3 or 7-day supply

4. More medication–assisted treatment
5. Prevent “doctor-shopping” by improving state prescription drug monitoring programs
6. More behavioral and mental health providers
7. Support for comprehensive opioid recovery centers
8. Help for babies born in opioid withdrawal
9. Help for mothers with opioid use disorders addicted to opioids
10. More early intervention with vulnerable children who have experienced trauma

- The omnibus appropriations bill Congress passed in March of this year included \$4.7 billion to fight the opioid crisis, of which \$1 billion was for grants to states.
- The fiscal year 2019 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill, which the Senate passed just last month, includes \$3.7 billion to help combat the opioid crisis.
- That would mean Congress has approved roughly \$8.4 billion within a few months.
- According to Senator Blunt, the chairman of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that approves this bill each year, federal funding to help combat the opioid epidemic has increased nearly 1,300 percent over the past 4 years.

The stories of the opioid crisis:

- On June 14, 2015, Becky Savage lost two of her four sons – Nick and Jack – after they accidentally overdosed on a combination of alcohol and opioids they took at a graduation party.
- At a Senate health committee hearing in February, Becky asked, “How could two boys who have always seemed to make good decisions in life make a choice that would ultimately cost them their life?...how did someone’s prescription end up in the pocket of a teenager at a graduation party?”
- Nick and Jack were just two of the 33,000 Americans who died in 2015 from an opioid overdose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- By 2016, the number of people who died from an opioid overdose had increased to 42,000 Americans.

- We suspect those numbers are even higher now – last year, 1,776 Tennesseans died of a drug overdose, according to the Tennessee Department of Health, up from 1,630 in 2016.
- And we know that the opioid crisis is ravaging virtually every American community.
- Becky’s story was just one of the heartbreaking stories the Senate health committee heard over the last year, at our seven bipartisan hearings on the opioid crisis.
- We heard Senator Isakson tell us of waking up to answer a phone call at 3 a.m. in December 2016 – his son John calling to tell Senator Isakson that his grandson had passed away from an opioid overdose.
- And we heard from Dr. Omar Abubaker [AH-boo-bocker], who lost his youngest son, Adam, at 21 years old after he overdosed on a mixture of heroin and benzodiazepines [ben-zo-di-a-za-peen]. At our hearing he said, “Since my son’s

death three years ago, more than 165,000 other parents in this country have experienced the same agony.”

- I imagine that every senator has heard heartbreaking stories of how the opioid crisis has impacted parents and children, doctors and nurses, and entire communities in their states.
- But at our hearings, we also heard stories of hope.
- Jessica Hulseby Nickel knows “firsthand the devastating impact that addiction can have on families,” losing both her parents to addiction. Jessica has since dedicated her life’s work to helping others battling the same disease.

- Trish Tanner, the Chief Pharmacy Officer at Ballad Health in Johnson City, Tennessee, lost her nephew Dustin to an opioid overdose. As part of an executive fellowship program, she worked on a project on ways to reduce opioid prescribing, saying that, “as Dustin’s aunt and as a pharmacist, I have a duty and a desire to bring about change now.”
- And to spread awareness and tell the story of losing their two sons, Becky Savage and her husband have created the 525 Foundation in memory of Nick and Jack.
- When she testified before our committee, Becky told us “you can hear a pin drop in many of the auditoriums I speak in.”
- After hearing her story, you could have heard a pin drop in the committee’s hearing room too.

Creating the environment to fight opioids

- The challenge of solving the opioid crisis has often been described as needing a moonshot. Solving the opioid crisis might require the energy and resources of a moonshot, but ultimately it is not something that can be solved by a single agency in Washington, D.C.
- What the federal government can do is create an environment so that everyone—governors, mayors, judges, counselors, law enforcement, doctors, nurses and families like the Savages—can succeed in fighting the crisis.
- This is a package of more than 70 proposals from nearly three-quarters of the Senate – 72 members – that includes the work of five committees – the health committee that I Chair, and the Finance, Judiciary, Commerce, and Banking Committees.

- Since last October, the Senate health committee, which I chair and Senator Murray is the Ranking Member of, has held seven hearings on the opioid crisis.
- We heard from governors, doctors, addiction experts, family members, and others, on how the federal government can be the best possible partner as we work to combat the opioid crisis.
- We took the input we heard at the first six hearings and turned it into a draft package of proposals, which Senator Murray and I released on April 5.
- On April 11, we held our seventh hearing to review that draft proposal.
- On April 17, Senator Murray and I introduced an updated package of 40 proposals, based on feedback we heard at the seventh hearing.

- On April 24, the Senate health committee voted 23-0 to pass this legislation which included proposals from 38 different Senators.
- Because this crisis is so widespread, the Finance, Judiciary, Commerce, and Banking Committees have also been working on proposals to fight the opioid crisis.
- On May 22, the Commerce Committee passed two provisions.
- On May 24, the Judiciary Committee passed six provisions.
- And on June 12, the Finance Committee 22 provisions.
- We have Also included is a provision that the Banking Committee has worked on.

- Senator Murray and I have since worked with Senators Hatch, Grassley, Thune, Wyden, Feinstein, and Nelson, to combine all of these provisions, along with other proposals, such as Senator Portman's STOP Act, into one package of legislation – The Opioid Crisis Response Act.
- Over 20 Senators contributed to the Finance Committee's provisions.
- Over 25 Senators contributed to the Judiciary Committee's provisions.
- And 7 Senators contributed to the Commerce Committee's provisions.
- I think this is a testament to just how far-reaching this crisis is and why we should act quickly in a bipartisan way to pass legislation in the Senate.
- In June, the House of Representatives passed their own package of legislation to fight the opioid crisis by a vote of 396 to 14.

- Senate and House staff have begun to combine our legislation and what the House has passed into an even stronger bill to fight the nation's worst public health crisis.
- My hope is that the five Senate committees will work quickly with our House colleagues to reach an agreement by September 21, so the House can pass a final opioids package, the Senate can pass it, and we can send it to the president's desk as quickly as possible.
- I know there is a bipartisan sense of urgency to completing our work so we can help states and communities fight the opioid crisis.

What this bill does:

- The Opioid Crisis Response Act builds on the work Congress has done to combat the opioid crisis over the last few years.

- In 2016, Congress passed the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, CARA, to give a substantial boost to states on the front lines of the opioid crisis. CARA provided grants to expand access to life-saving opioid overdose reversal medications and to support states' efforts to help individuals with an opioid use disorder get and stay well.
- Later in 2016, Congress passed the 21st Century Cures Act, which included \$1 billion over two years in state grants to fight the opioid crisis and sought to accelerate research for major discoveries, like a new non-addictive pain medicine, which we heard at our hearings is really the “holy grail” of solving the opioid crisis.
- The omnibus appropriations bill Congress passed in March of this year included \$4.7 billion to fight the opioid crisis, of which \$1 billion was for grants to states.

- The fiscal year 2019 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill, which the Senate passed just last week, includes \$3.7 billion to help combat the opioid crisis.
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- According to Senator Blunt, the chairman of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that approves this bill each year, federal funding to help combat the opioid epidemic has increased nearly 1,300 percent over the past 4 years.
- The bill we are voting on next week builds on this legislation and funding.
- **Let me repeat 10 key provisions in the Opioid Crisis Response Act:**
 1. The STOP Act—Stop illegal drugs, including fentanyl, from coming across the border through the mail

2.New non-addictive painkillers, research and fast-track

3.Blister packs for opioids, such as a 3 or 7-day supply

4.More medication–assisted treatment

5.Prevent “doctor-shopping” by improving state prescription drug monitoring programs

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7.Support for comprehensive opioid recovery centers

8.Help for babies born in opioid withdrawal

9.Help for mothers with opioid use disorders

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- These are just a portion of the more than 70 provisions in the Opioid Crisis Response Act, which, along with the \$4.7 billion Congress appropriated in March, will go a long way to helping end the opioid crisis.

Conclusion:

- This is, as Leader McConnell said, “landmark legislation” that represents the work of nearly a quarter of the Senate, five committees, and countless staff who have worked together to help states put an end to the opioid crisis ravaging virtually every American community.
- The House of Representatives has already passed its version of this bill.
- There is bipartisan urgency for the Senate to complete our work so we can finish working with our House colleagues to send a final package of legislation to the President’s desk.

- No mother should have to go through what Becky Savage went through.
- It is time to help states and communities bring an end to the opioid crisis, and this legislation will give them the tools to do that.